

Ambition and the Angel: The Mary Cunningham Saga



William Agee

By Gail Sheehy
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First of a series

MARY CUNNINGHAM and William Agee were one of the most dazzling executive teams to share a corporate jet before Agee publicly disavowed romance as any part of the motive force behind her meteoric rise at the Bendix Corp. It was a burst of candor that backfired two weeks ago into a major national news story, creating "excessive attention" and "false innuendoes" which, Cunningham said, made it impossible for her to carry out her new duties as vice president for strategic planning. She knew she would have to resign. But how? Her own strategy was brilliant.

First, Cunningham offered to take a leave of absence. Since the Bendix board of directors had recommended her promotion as a way to stop office

gossip, Mary was putting the ball back in their court—presuming they would go public with a full vote of confidence in her. They did. With her reputation restored, Mary Cunningham waited 10 days, and then resigned.

Where does this leave men and women of the future who would aspire to a close working relationship at the top? Were Agee and Cunningham sabotaged by envy and brought down by ageism, sexism and corporate conservatism? Is Mary Cunningham just a clever corporate game player? Or is she something more?

The irony of the situation was summed up by a top financial-world executive who knew of the intensely religious background that had molded Mary's missionary zeal:

"If Mary Cunningham was trying to capture anything from Bill Agee, it wasn't his heart—more likely she wanted to save his soul."

I tended to agree. Mary Cunningham is someone I knew quite well from taping a long interview with her about her background and goals 15 months ago, while researching a book still in preparation. For that reason, despite a company ban prohibiting further comment, both she and Agee agreed to see me to round out the story. What follows is an exclusive account of the rise and sudden deceleration, and recent recovery, of Mary Cunningham's rocket to success.

Mary Cunningham came across the radar screens of the corporate recruiters like a comet. Everyone who interviewed her had the same impressions. "She's brilliant." "She's intimidating." "She's aggressive." "She's beautiful, too!" And everyone wanted to know the same thing. "What drives her?"

Teams of interviewers picked through her brain that spring of '79 before she graduated with breathtaking credentials. She was a Phi Beta Kappa philosophy graduate from Wellesley, and then one of 30 out of 800 business school students elected to Harvard's Century Club as leaders of tomorrow. In her second year at Harvard Business School she took a course overload, carried a job, created an exam review program for first-year business students and sailed out with honors at 27.

"If there's a woman in America who can become chief executive officer of a Fortune 500 company anytime in the next 10 years—on ability—it's Mary," the dean of HBS, James Heskett, had told the women's student association.

The corporate world drooled. Karen Walker, herself one of the highest-potential female middle managers at Bendix, lit up when she met Mary on a recruiting swing. "She's super-quick,



Mary Cunningham

See CUNNINGHAM, F10, Col. 1

The Flint and the Fire of Idaho's Sagebrush Rebellion

This is the fourth in a series of American Portraits 1980 written by Pulitzer Prize winner Haynes Johnson who is traveling across the United States talking to Americans about the issues and the choices facing them this presidential campaign year.



By Haynes Johnson

BOISE, Idaho—In the promotional blurbs enticing newcomers to this rugged state of stunning mountain vistas, sparkling rivers and some of the most fertile land in the world, the seductive lure is a vision of the supposedly simpler, better life. Idaho is what America used to be, the ads say. If the presidential race turns out the way many here passionately hope, Idaho will be transformed into a symbol of what America becomes. Nowhere are the issues more clearly drawn, nowhere do you find a more profound sense of the larger stakes in this election.

The issue in Idaho is not whether Ronald Reagan will win here. He will, overwhelmingly. The issue is what a Reagan victory means to the West and the nation. Idaho represents the struggle between private development of natural resources and public supervision of U.S. lands, of a return to laissez-faire governmental policies and the role of Washington in the federal system, of the influence of the so-called "new right" in the 1980s and of the political swing now taking place in the country.

Here, as in other western states, the conflicts are sharp and the emotions high. Idaho debates the "sagebrush rebellion," a move to return vast stretches of federal lands to the states for probable development and quite possibly eventual private ownership... the scope of new mining operations such as the mammoth Cyprus Mines molybdenum project near Challis, the setting aside of 30,000 public acres for cobalt mining in the West Panther Creek area, the upsurge of dredge mining on state rivers and the proposed Smokey Canyon phosphate mine in the Caribou National Forest... the preservation of such wildlife and recreation terrain as the "birds of prey" area in the Snake River Canyon... the disposition of nuclear wastes and the needs of the nation to find new sources of energy for the future.

But most of all, in this campaign, Idaho debates the U.S. Senate race between the Democratic incumbent Frank Church and his Republican challenger Steve Symms.

The Chase-Symms contest is a classic battle, with special national significance in the politics of 1980. Along with other liberal Democratic senators, Church has been targeted for defeat by highly organized and well-financed conservative groups operating from outside Idaho. The techniques being employed here are the same as in other critical races—expenditures of large sums of money, assaults on personal character and reputation, and dedicated grassroots work that carries the flavor of a religious crusade.

To an outsider, the remarks many people make sound extreme and strangely out of place in such a setting as this corner of the West. Here you have no hints of problems. Everything appears peaceful. The sights you see match the boasts of the travelogues: the air is pristine, as nearly everyone points out; the streams do glisten in the bright fall sunshine; the sunsets are

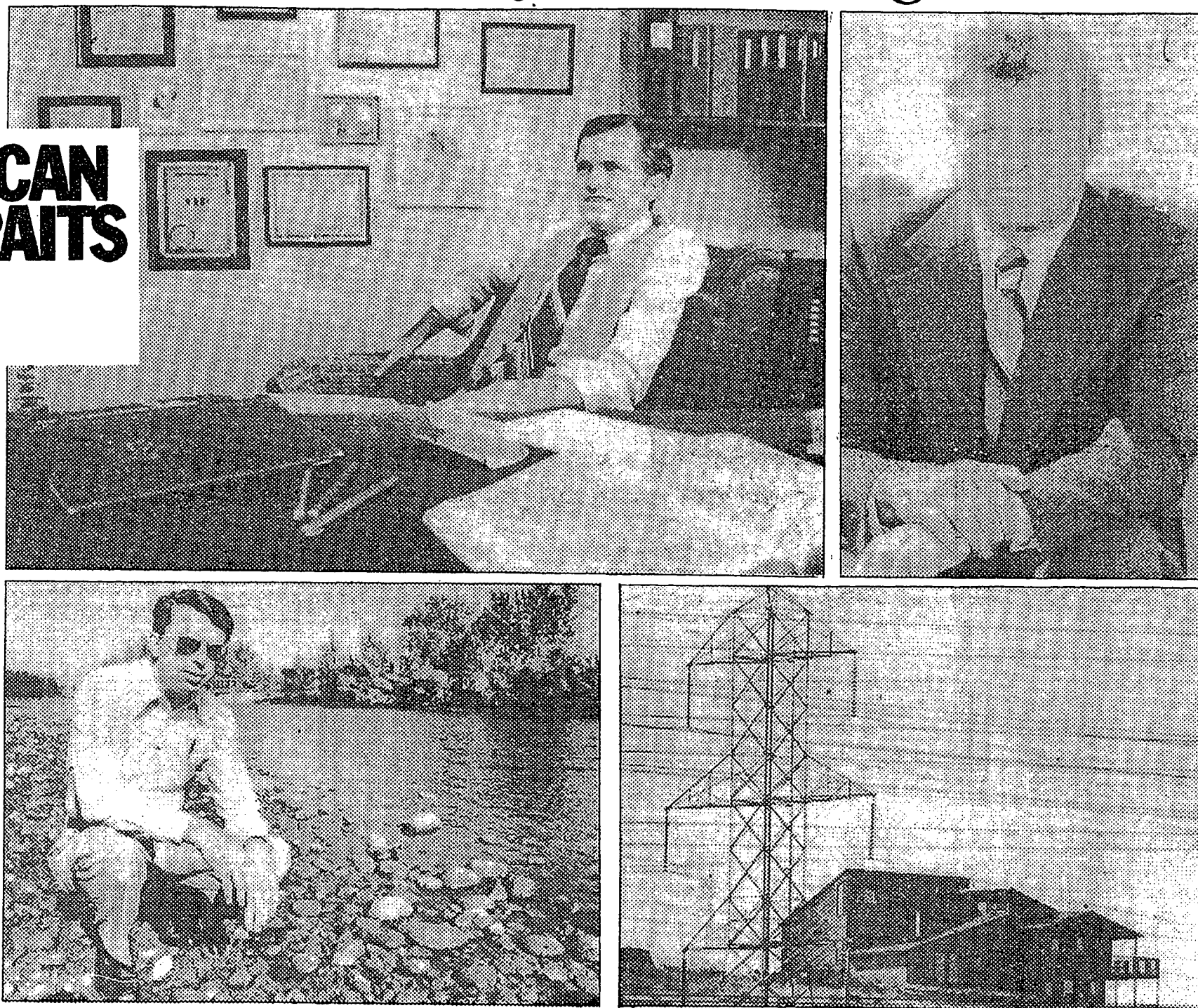
election to defeat him. He faces not only strong organized opposition from outside Idaho, but from within.

The Moral Majority

"I'm for anybody who's throwing the Rev. Buddy Hoffman, while seated in his immaculate living room where it's hard to imagine even a spot of dust intruding. "I'm very much a part of the Moral Majority."

Hoffman is a slim, pale young man of 27 who keeps his black hair cropped short and dresses in three-piece black pin-striped suits set off by somber tie

See PORTRAITS, F13, Col. 1



Clockwise from top left: Rev. Buddy Hoffman, Vern Renscroft, Idaho power lines and State Sen. Ken Robison; photos by Dave Tinney for The Washington Post

Danger Ahead—The 'Skins Lost

By Art Buchwald

SOMETHING HAPPENS to a town when it has a losing football team. The people become embittered, irrational and, in some cases, downright spiteful. Now it isn't as serious if the team has a franchise in Green Bay, or New Orleans—but when that team is located in Washington, D.C., and is called the Redskins, it could affect every man, woman and child in the country.

Monday morning is the most dangerous time of all, because that is when most of us still have the bitter taste of defeat in our mouths. People wander around the government offices snapping and snarling at each other, and purposely spilling cooler water on each other's shoes. Anyone who is waiting for a decision from Washington could become an innocent victim of what psychiatrists call "The Washington Redskin Blues."

Here is how anyone could be affected.

"Sir, there is a letter here from a World War I veteran who says he hasn't received his check for four months."

"Isn't that just too bad? Let him wait like everybody else. If he had a job, he wouldn't be looking for his government handout every month."

Over at the EPA, they are about to make a multimillion-dollar decision on a project to be built in Philadelphia.

The person who made the study reports, "Philadelphia has met all our standards and qualifications."

"Impossible. Everyone knows if they met all our standards and regulations, it would be impossible to build the thing. I say we don't give them the go-ahead."

"What will we tell them?"

"To appeal our decision like everybody else."

"But they'll be so disappointed in Philadelphia."

"They should have thought of that when they cheered the Eagles while

Capitol Punishment

they were trouncing us yesterday afternoon."

Over at the Federal Home Loan Bank.

"Would you like a cup of coffee, Mr. Zack?"

"Yes, Miss Thatcher, and you also might tell Higgins to raise the home loan rate another point. I never saw so many holding penalties by an offensive line in my life."

"Pardon me, Mr. Zack."

"Never mind. I was just thinking out loud."

Over at the SEC, a Redskin fan picks up the phone.

"Merrill, I'm turning your company's file over to the Justice Department for criminal antitrust violations."

... No, I have no intention of telling

you why. If you saw the game yesterday on television, you wouldn't be asking me a stupid question like that."

The Department of Agriculture takes its football hard, too.

"The cotton farmers in Texas are still waiting for our decision on how much support we will give them this year because of the drought. If they don't get an answer soon, they could go under."

"Tell them we'll give them \$500 million, if the Dallas Cowboys will give us Tony Dorsett and the Houston Oilers trade us Earl Campbell."

"Is that legal?"

"Probably not. But we have to get some running backs if we ever hope to beat anybody this year."

The most dangerous place of all to be when the Redskins are losing is the Pentagon. They take their football very seriously over there.

"Sir, we've just received a report that a Danish fishing boat has been spotted in our territorial waters off Maine."

"Sink it."

"Did you say sink it?"

"You heard me, commander. I said sink it."

"But why?"

"Because Mark Mosely can't kick a field goal. Do you need a better reason?"

"No, sir, that's good enough for me."

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"Distinguished Guests" by Charles Dana Gibson



By Judith Martin

Proper Procedures For Enjoying a White House Dinner

WHEN Washingtonians say "The White House belongs to all the People," they mean that they feel entitled to be invited to dinner there, whether or not they have shown any kind feelings for the host.

The value of such invitations, among those who occasionally receive them, is not in the expectation of seeing magnificent clothes and jewels or hearing the political secrets and sparkling conversation of the country's most interesting citizens. White tie and ball dresses with 18-button white gloves haven't been worn there in years, the people you are likely to meet are distinguished by the size of their political contributions, and what

See MANNERS, F7, Col. 1

VIP

All That Tae-Kwon-Do Pays Off

By Maxine Cheshire

NO ONE would expect columnist Jack Anderson's actor son to be cast as anything but one of the "good guys" in any movie.

So when a South Korean producer came to Washington last year in search of an American Bruce Lee, Randy Anderson was signed as one of the leads in a karate epic which has just been completed in Seoul.

Washington's Tae-Kwon-Do tycoon, Jhoon Rhee, a longtime friend of the Anderson family, is the other "good guy" in the film, which has two heroes and two villains.

Rhee is such a celebrity in South Korea that the movie may be titled "The Return of Rhee" when it is released there. But another title will be used in the United States, and Randy Anderson could be a bigger drawing card with some audiences as a wholesome, clean-cut All-American boy battling against the forces of evil.

See VIP, F9, Col. 1